

18.12.80: 2.30 p.m.

ARCIC 236/Conclusion/4

### CONCLUSION

In our conclusion to the Venice Statement we affirmed that we had reached 'a consensus on authority in the Church and, in particular, on the basic principles of primacy', which we believed to be of 'fundamental importance' (para. 24). Nevertheless we showed that four outstanding problems related to this subject required further serious study since, if they remained unresolved, they would appear to constitute insurmountable obstacles to our growing together towards communion. After four years of intensive study we are able to present a fresh appraisal of their significance. This has given a new perspective to our conclusions. The four difficulties were the interpretation of the Petrine texts, the doctrinal understanding of the language of 'divine right', the affirmation of papal infallibility and the nature of the jurisdiction exercised by a universal primate. It seems to us now that our understanding of the Petrine texts, of 'divine right' and of universal jurisdiction indicates that any differences between us in these areas need not impede a realistic coming together of our two communions. On the contrary respect for these differences would give enrichment to our common life. It is only in the matter of infallibility that serious differences remain. Anglicans do not deny that on occasions the Bishop of Rome has spoken so as to protect the Church from error (as have other Church leaders also). They are confident of the assistance of the Spirit in keeping the Church from irrevocable error in essential matters of faith; disagreeing, however, or at least expressing reserve if this protection is claimed to be guaranteed a priori by mere virtue of the functioning of the teaching office of the universal primate. Admittedly the rigorous conditions prescribed in the Roman Catholic tradition, requiring consonance with Scripture and the sensus fidelium, help to narrow the gap. Moreover,

Contemporary discussions of conciliarity and primacy in both communions suggest that we are not dealing with positions destined to remain static.

We do not want to minimise this difficulty. But when we consider it not in isolation but in the whole framework of what we agree, we pose the question: is this problem so great as to prevent our two communions from venturing with greater resolve upon real progress towards unity? We are convinced that some difficulties will be resolved only when a fresh and courageous initiative has been taken.